CHESTNUT HILL, MA (July 2007) -- This month, Rebekah Levine Coley, associate professor of psychology in the Lynch School of Education, begins a comparative investigation of how behaviors such as substance use, risky sexual activity, and lack of adequate exercise, nutrition, and weight control contribute substantial health risks for youth in developed countries.

Coley, the recipient of a Fulbright Senior Scholarship, will conduct her research at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. She is one of only 20 American Fulbright Scholars traveling to Australia this academic year.

"Australia has similarities with the United States in economic and behavioral well-being, but also has notable policy and cultural differences -- an interesting combination for in-depth comparisons," she said.

"The Social Policy Research Centre at University of New South Wales is a top research center with excellent facilities," she said, adding that the Fulbright award provides opportunities for collaboration and data collection with researchers, policy makers and practitioners involved in the promotion and prevention efforts, necessary for cultural understanding.

"My research will compare levels of health risk behaviors in Australian and American youth, and assess cultural and environmental contributors to such behaviors," said Coley. "It will also assess health risk prevention and health promotion policies targeting youth."

Coley's goal is to better understand the prevalence, precursors and policy response to these three sets of health risk behaviors among Australian youth, both across that country and as compared to the United States.

Coley previously has been the principal investigator on a number of research projects funded by the W.T. Grant Foundation and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, as well as the co-recipient of the Social Policy Award from the Society for Research in Adolescence.

She was one of the principal researchers in a longitudinal multidisciplinary study following more than 2,400 low-income children and their families in Boston, Chicago and San Antonio to determine the long-term implications of welfare reform and economic disadvantage on urban children and families. She also was author of a recent study that highlighted the importance of low-income non-resident fathers' continued involvement in the lives of their teen-aged children.

The prestigious Fulbright program is the largest educational scholarship of its kind, created by U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright and the U.S. government in 1946. Aimed at promoting mutual understanding through educational exchange, it operates between the U.S. and 150 countries. In Australia, the scholarships are funded by the Australian and U.S. governments and corporate partners and administered by the Australian-American Fulbright Commission in Canberra.